UPSC MAINS · ANSWER PRACTICE

Essay · Essay

Life is long journey between human being and being humane

मनुष्य होने और मानव बनने के बीच

का लम्बा सफर ही जीवन है

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Answer Hint

Biological existence versus moral development, humanity and compassion, empathy, dignity, ethical conduct, social responsibility, education and character, emotional intelligence, constitutional morality, Gandhian philosophy, service to others, overcoming prejudice, humane governance, personal transformation

Model Answer

Introduction

Every human being is born with a human body, but becoming truly humane is a lifelong process. Biological existence gives us the capacity to think, feel and act; humanity emerges when these capacities are guided by compassion, empathy, justice and responsibility. A person may possess intelligence, wealth, authority and professional success, yet fail to recognise the suffering or dignity of others. Conversely, someone with limited material resources may demonstrate extraordinary humanity through kindness, sacrifice and service.

The statement, “Life is a long journey between human being and being humane,” highlights the distinction between being human by birth and becoming humane through conduct. It suggests that the purpose of life is not merely to survive, accumulate possessions or achieve personal success, but to develop the moral qualities that make human existence meaningful.

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This journey is neither automatic nor complete at a particular age. It requires continuous reflection, learning, self-correction and the willingness to place human dignity above selfish interests.

Body

1. Being human and being humane: Understanding the distinction

Being a human being is a biological fact, whereas being humane is an ethical achievement.

- **Being human** refers to belonging to the human species, possessing physical and mental capabilities and participating in society.
- **Being humane** refers to exercising these capabilities with kindness, fairness, empathy, tolerance and respect for others.

A highly educated person who discriminates against someone because of caste or economic status may be intellectually accomplished but lacks humane conduct. In contrast, a person who helps an injured stranger without expecting recognition demonstrates humanity through action.

Thus, human development must include both intellectual growth and moral maturity. Knowledge enables people to understand the world, while humane values guide them in deciding how to act within it.

2. Empathy: The foundation of humanity

Empathy is the ability to understand another person's feelings and perspective. It allows individuals to look beyond their own experiences and recognise the difficulties faced by others.

A society becomes more humane when people do not regard poverty, disability, unemployment or social exclusion merely as problems affecting strangers.

For instance, an employer who understands the circumstances of a worker facing a family emergency may provide reasonable assistance rather than treating the worker as a replaceable resource. Similarly, a citizen who considers the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities may support accessible public spaces.

Empathy transforms abstract concern into meaningful action. It encourages people to ask not only what they can gain from others, but also how their decisions affect them.

However, empathy must be accompanied by fairness and sound judgement. Humane conduct does not mean accepting every demand

uncritically; it means responding to people with dignity while considering legitimate responsibilities and competing needs.

3. Compassion and kindness in everyday life

Humanity is often expressed through small, ordinary actions rather than extraordinary sacrifices.

Listening patiently to a distressed person, helping an elderly neighbour, treating domestic workers respectfully, sharing resources with someone in need and refusing to humiliate others are everyday expressions of compassion.

Such actions may appear insignificant individually, but their cumulative effect can transform social relationships. They create trust, reduce loneliness and strengthen cooperation.

Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on service and concern for the weakest reflects this understanding. His idea of *Sarvodaya*, or the welfare of all, places collective well-being at the centre of social progress.

A humane life is therefore not measured only by public achievements or charitable donations. It is also reflected in how individuals treat those who have little power to reward or punish them.

4. Overcoming prejudice and respecting human dignity

The journey towards humanity requires individuals to question prejudices inherited from their families, communities and social environments.

Caste discrimination, communal hatred, gender stereotypes and contempt for people from poorer backgrounds arise when individuals judge others through social categories rather than recognise their shared dignity.

A humane person does not demand that everyone have the same beliefs, language or lifestyle. Instead, they recognise that differences do not justify humiliation, exclusion or violence.

India's constitutional values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity provide a framework for this moral development. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law, while Article 15 prohibits discrimination on specified grounds.

These principles remind citizens that humanity must extend beyond personal affection for family and friends. It must also include respect for strangers, minorities, disadvantaged communities and people whose opinions differ from their own.

5. Education must develop character, not merely competence

Education is one of the most powerful means of moving from human existence towards humane living. Yet education that focuses exclusively on examination scores, professional qualifications and economic success may leave moral development neglected.

A complete education should cultivate critical thinking, emotional intelligence, social responsibility and respect for diversity.

Stories, literature, history, community engagement and classroom discussions can expose students to different experiences and encourage them to examine ethical dilemmas.

For example, a student who learns about social exclusion should be encouraged not merely to memorise facts but also to consider how discriminatory behaviour can be challenged in everyday life.

Teachers and educational institutions play an important role by modelling fairness, discouraging bullying and providing equal opportunities to students.

Education becomes transformative when knowledge improves not only what individuals can do, but also how responsibly they use their abilities.

6. Difficulties and failures can deepen humanity

The journey towards becoming humane is rarely straightforward. People experience anger, jealousy, ambition, insecurity and disappointment. These emotions can lead to selfish behaviour, but they can also become opportunities for self-understanding.

Failure may teach humility. Personal suffering can increase sensitivity towards others experiencing similar difficulties. Acknowledging one's mistakes can develop honesty and moral courage.

For example, a manager who has experienced unfair treatment may become more attentive to workplace dignity. A public official who recognises the hardship caused by an administrative error may become more careful and responsive.

Nevertheless, suffering does not automatically make everyone compassionate. Some people respond to hardship by becoming resentful or insensitive. The important factor is reflection: whether individuals learn from their experiences and choose to respond more wisely.

Humane development therefore requires the courage to acknowledge one's limitations and the willingness to change.

7. Power and success must be guided by humanity

Modern society often rewards competition, productivity and achievement. These are important for economic progress, but they become problematic when success is pursued without ethical limits.

A businessperson who maximises profits through unsafe working conditions may be financially successful but socially irresponsible. A political leader who gains popularity by encouraging hatred may possess influence without demonstrating humanity.

Similarly, technological progress can improve healthcare, communication and education, but it can also enable surveillance, exploitation and the spread of misinformation.

The ethical question is not simply whether an action is effective, but whether it respects human dignity and produces justifiable outcomes.

True success combines competence with conscience. It uses power to solve problems, expands opportunities for others and avoids treating people merely as instruments for personal advancement.

8. Humane public administration and responsible citizenship

The distinction between being human and being humane is especially relevant to public service.

A civil servant exercises authority over decisions that affect people's livelihoods, access to welfare benefits, education, healthcare and justice. Technical competence is essential, but it must be accompanied by empathy, impartiality and accountability.

Consider an elderly citizen who is unable to complete a complicated online application for a pension. An indifferent official may reject the application for procedural deficiencies without offering guidance. A humane official will explain the requirements, facilitate access within the rules and ensure that the citizen's legitimate entitlement is not denied merely because of a technical difficulty.

Such responsiveness does not mean abandoning procedures or favouring individuals arbitrarily. It means applying rules fairly while recognising the real circumstances of citizens.

At the same time, humane governance requires efficient institutions, transparent processes and protection against corruption. Compassion without competence may fail to deliver results, while competence without compassion can become insensitive and mechanical.

Citizens also have responsibilities: obeying just laws, helping vulnerable people, protecting public property, respecting diversity and participating constructively in democratic life.

9. Science, technology and the need for moral wisdom

Human civilisation has developed extraordinary scientific and technological capabilities. Medical advances save lives, digital platforms connect communities and automation improves productivity.

Yet these achievements raise ethical questions. Should personal data be collected without meaningful consent? How should artificial intelligence be used in decisions affecting employment or welfare? Who should bear the costs of technological displacement?

Such questions demonstrate that technical capability alone cannot determine what ought to be done.

A humane approach places human welfare, privacy, fairness and accountability at the centre of technological progress. It ensures that innovation benefits society rather than merely concentrating power and wealth.

The more powerful human capabilities become, the more important moral judgement becomes.

10. From individual humanity to collective progress

Humanity begins with personal conduct but extends into institutions and public policy.

A compassionate individual can help a person in distress. A humane institution can establish systems that prevent thousands of people from experiencing the same hardship. A just government can reduce poverty, improve healthcare and protect people against discrimination.

Therefore, charity and personal kindness should complement structural reform rather than substitute for it.

For example, feeding a hungry person provides immediate relief, while effective nutrition programmes, employment opportunities and social protection address the wider causes of hunger.

A humane society combines personal generosity with institutional justice. It recognises both the immediate needs of individuals and the structural conditions that shape their lives.

11. The journey is continuous

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No individual can claim to have achieved perfect humanity. Even well-intentioned people can make mistakes, hold unconscious prejudices or fail to understand another person's circumstances.

The journey requires regular self-examination: Am I treating others fairly? Do I listen before judging? Am I willing to admit mistakes? Do my decisions respect the dignity of those affected?

Practices such as reflection, dialogue, service, gratitude and learning from diverse experiences can strengthen moral awareness.

The objective is not moral perfection, but continuous improvement. Becoming humane means recognising that every interaction offers an opportunity either to reinforce prejudice or to practise respect.

Conclusion

Life's deepest achievement lies not merely in becoming successful, powerful or knowledgeable, but in becoming worthy of the human capacities we possess. The journey from being human to being humane requires empathy to understand others, compassion to respond to suffering, courage to challenge injustice and wisdom to use power responsibly.

For individuals, it means aligning actions with ethical values. For institutions, it means placing dignity, fairness and accountability at the heart of decision-making. For society, it means ensuring that progress benefits people without discrimination or exclusion.

Ultimately, humanity is not a quality demonstrated only during extraordinary moments. It is revealed in everyday choices—in the respect shown to the powerless, the fairness exercised under pressure and the willingness to help without expecting a reward.

We are born human, but we become humane through the choices we make every day.

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